

"But really, Adonis, wasn't I worthy of being thanked for my troubles? Offered a gift of sweet incense? Heedless of all I had done, he offered me neither! Immediate outrage was followed by keen indignation; and firmly resolving not to be spurned in the future, I guarded against it by making this pair an example.

"Now they were passing a temple deep in the forest, built long ago by Echion to honor Cybele,⁸ Mother of Gods, and now the length of their journey urged them to rest here, where unbridled desire possessed Hippomenes, moved by the strength of my godhead. There was a dim and cave-like recess near the temple, hewn out of pumice, a shrine to the ancient religion, wherein a priest of these old rites had set a great many carved wooden idols. Hippomenes entered that place, and by his forbidden behavior defiled it;⁹ in horror, the sacred images turned away from the act, and Cybele prepared to plunge the guilty pair in Stygian waters, but that seemed too easy; so now their elegant pale necks are cloaked in tawny manes; curved claws are their fingers; arms are now forelegs, and all the weight of their bodies shifts to their torsos; and now their tails sweep the arena; fierce now, their faces; growls supplant verbal expression; the forest now is their bedroom; a terror to others, meekly these lions champ at the bit of the harness on either side of the yoke of Cybele's chariot.

"My darling, you must avoid these and all other wild beasts, who will not turn tail, but show off their boldness in battle; flee them or else your courage will prove our ruin!"

"And after warning him, she went off on her journey, carried aloft by her swans; but his courage resisted her admonitions. It happened that as his dogs followed a boar they were tracking, they roused it from where it was hidden, and when it attempted to rush from the forest, Adonis pierced it, but lightly, casting his spear from an angle; with its long snout, it turned and knocked loose the weapon stained with its own blood, then bore down upon our hero, and, as he attempted to flee for his life in sheer terror, it sank its tusks deep into the young fellow's privates, and stretched him out on the yellow sands, where he lay dying.

"Aloft in her light, swan-driven chariot, Venus had not yet gotten to Cyprus; from a great distance she recognized the dying groans of Adonis and turned her birds back to him; when she saw from midair his body lying there, lifeless, stained with its own blood,

8. A fertility goddess of Asia Minor known as the Great Mother. She was often pictured wearing a crown that

cart drawn by them.

9. It was considered

she beat her breasts and tore at her hair and her garments,
and leapt from her chariot, raging, to argue with grim Fate:

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"It will not be altogether as you would have it,"
she said. 'My grief for Adonis will be remembered
forever, and every year will see, reenacted
in ritual form, his death and my lamentation;
and the blood of the hero will be transformed to a flower.
Or were *you* not once allowed to change a young woman¹
to fragrant mint, Persephone? Do you begrudge me
the transformation of my beloved Adonis?'

8

"And as she spoke, she sprinkled his blood with sweet nectar,
which made it swell up, like a transparent bubble
that rises from muck; and in no more than an hour
a flower sprang out of that soil, blood red in its color,
just like the flesh that lies underneath the tough rind
of the seed-hiding pomegranate. Brief is its season,
for the winds from which it takes its name, the anemone,
shake off those petals so lightly clinging and fated to perish."